Austin Monheit

Prof. Hobbs

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Despite the Internet’s prevalence today around the world, research on Internet pornography use is still in the beginning stages. Researchers today find it difficult to compare their data, because no prior data exist. Those who embark into the world of Internet pornography, to study, are the pioneers of such information. The research conducted by Mr. William A. Fisher and Mr. Azy Barak attempts to study not only the availability of pornography on the Internet, but how an individual is psychologically affected by viewing it. Additionally, what preexisting factors contribute to a person’s interest or lack of interest in viewing sexually explicit material. Are their motivating factors that lead a person to view pornography and how do those factors affect a person’s own sexual psyche? The Sexual Behavior Sequence theory helps to answer this question and others purposed by the authors.

“In a fashion never before imagined, men and women- and boys and girls- can acquire sexually explicit content on the Internet, effortlessly and privately, as a direct expression of their sexual and personal characteristics and inclinations” (Fisher, 2001,312). As mentioned, research of any kind, involving the Internet, is still in a primitive stage and just now beginning to be written. Research about individual’s interest, reasoning, and effects of viewing pornography through other mediums has been done, but the Internet is a completely different world where people can act out their sexual fantasies, create new identities, and even engage in cybersex.

There are several major questions being raised within the article regarding viewing of pornography in general and on the Internet. Do people’s personal sexual experiences, observations, and interest dictate what they search for when looking at pornography? Does the type of pornography that people view affect them overall? Is a person who chooses to watch violent pornography more likely to rape another person? Lastly, what type of impact does a rewarding or non-rewarding experience have on a person’s view of pornography in general? To answer these questions, Bogaert observed and recorded what types, if any, of pornography a collection of undergraduate students viewed and defined them based on their personality- aggressive, altruistic, delinquent, sensation seeking, and attraction to sexual aggression.

The characteristics of this sample relate to whether there is a correlation between sexual violence in real life and viewing violent pornography on the Internet. Is it a coincidence or do people watch what they know in their lives? One problem about the research conducted by Bogaert dealt with people’s openness and honesty. People are often embarrassed to admit they view pornography, let alone confessing to having unusual interest within the world of pornography. Their appears to be some discrepancy when talking about what information people put down on paper and what they do when no one is looking.

The variables included in this study were: personal and sexual background, content desired within pornography, sexual interests, personality, history of sexual aggression, and current sexual behavior. The two most interesting, and I think most important, variables are personality and the content a person viewed. Results overwhelmingly showed that “sexually explicit materials are almost certainly a joint function of the personality characteristics of the individual who seeks out such materials and of exposure to such materials…” (Fisher, 2001, 316). This makes a lot of sense. People often do not waste their time viewing pornography that does not satisfy their sexual desires, with the exception of experimentation or curiosity.

The chart showed that the number of reports of forcible rape, (violence) did not increase from 1995 to 1999. In fact, the number of reported violence decreased significantly even though there was an “exponential growth in the availability and use of all forms of Internet sexually implicit materials” (Fisher, 2001, 316). These findings complemented the percent of the undergraduate students who said they favored watching violent forms of pornography, 4%. In summary, all of these results proved that people watched what they were interested in and that experiencing any form of violent exposure- sexual or nonsexual, does not typically equate to a desire to watch violent pornography. It is mostly a personal preference. There were some reports that explained certain males with hostile masculinity and sexual promiscuity were more likely to be violent towards women; however, it was difficult to link pornography use as a cause of sexual aggressiveness.

Aside from this finding, research concluded that people who have positive sexual experiences, in real life and through viewing pornography over the Internet, tend to lean towards a “generalized trait disposition of erotophilia (feeling positive about all aspects of sex) and should respond to sexual cues with positive affect and evaluations” (Fisher, 2001,318). If a person has had negative sexual experiences, those will be matched with a negative disposition, known as erotophobia. If some is good, then more is better is an easier way to think about this finding using the Sexual Behavior Sequence.

Although this research is one of the first to be done with the Internet and pornography, there is the need to create an agenda for future research on the Internet. The Sexual Behavior Sequence theory will be used to help answer questions about a person’s interest and desires when selecting sexually explicit materials online. Do those with preexisting positive experiences related to sex have a greater likelihood to engage in larger amounts of self-regulated consumption of pornography? On the other hand, does Internet pornography reinforce a person’s preexisting feelings towards sex or can it have a reverse affect? The ability to do research and record observations in this area is purely based on a person’s honesty in a private area of people’s lives.

A lot of the information that I read in this article made sense to me. A majority of people will seek out pornography that is of interest to them and ignore the rest. It seems like it would be an obvious conclusion, but I think the larger question deals with the psychological mindset of a person. The factors that contribute towards a person’s feeling about sex and pornography are intriguing and it is interesting to see some of the correlations between the two. I wonder if it is possible to change your feelings towards sexually explicit materials. The research explained that often, your emotions/ experiences will dictate how you feel about pornography, but did not talk about the possibility of changing your view. Dealing with pornography is a tricky area, but I think that with the Internet, people will begin to feel more inclined to express themselves because of the ability to hide their identity, if only for some incentive though.

References

Fisher, W. A., & Barak, A. (2001, November). Internet Pornography: A Social Psychological Perspective on Internet Sexuality. *The Journal of Sex Research, 38*(4), 312-323. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/‌stable/‌3813455